

Talking points
Welcome Sign Unveiling - "Birthplace of America's
Music"
Tuesday, May 12, 2009

Note: Thank the blues musician playing - Ben Payton, of Jackson.

Some may ask, why unveil a message on a new highway welcome sign at an airport?

Jackson-Evers International Airport is one of Mississippi's preeminent gateways. When air travelers get into ground transportation and head out onto our highways, we want them to feel welcome, too, just like visitors who drive in.

So, when we starting thinking about new highway signs that welcome people to Mississippi and carry a special, new message that really suits our state, we knew the busy road leading from the Jackson Airport out into the community provides very high visibility and would be one of the first places to put one.

Today, I am pleased to officially announce that new welcome signs are being placed around the state's points of entry, including Airport Road here in Jackson, just this side of the round-about. You'll see the signs at all 12 of Mississippi welcome centers, too - the first has already been placed at our Welcome Center in Vicksburg.

So far, signs have also been put up on I-55 in DeSoto County; I-20 in Warren, Lauderdale, and Jackson counties; I-10 in Jackson and Hancock counties; Highway 78 and Highway 61 in DeSoto county; and the newest will go up on I-55 in Pike County this week.

Many of us have known for a long time that Mississippi's musical heritage makes us the real "Birthplace of America's

Music” – from the blues, to country, to rock ‘n roll, to gospel.

Emerging from the Mississippi Delta, B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, and many, many others have made their unique sound the sound of Mississippi.

Over in Meridian, Jimmie Rodgers died way too young but is still recognized as the “Father of Country Music,” the Singing Brakeman who entertained audiences around the country.

Elvis Presley was born in Tupelo and took his singular brand of rock ‘n roll, and gospel, to a worldwide stage.

And, one of Mississippi’s leading gospel groups, The Williams Brothers, has traveled far and wide; they are great ambassadors for our state.

These new signs and the slogan are really designed to recognize and honor all of the talented men and women whose incredible array of entertainment skills put Mississippi on the world’s music map.

And that musical heritage draws visitors from around the world; it’s one of the reasons tourism is such a meaningful contributor to our economy:

- Tourism in Mississippi is a \$6 billion industry
- 85,000 direct jobs, nearly 31,000 indirect jobs – total of 116,000 jobs
- Tourism ranks 6th in total statewide employment
- Total payroll - \$2.56 billion
- Total visitors – 20.2 million

I dare say, no state has a greater claim on the slogan
“Birthplace of America’s Music” than Mississippi.

And, no state’s governor could be as proud as I am today
with this recognition, which comes, appropriately, during
National Travel and Tourism Week.

(PULL THE DROP CLOTH TO UNVEIL THE SIGN).

“Welcome to Mississippi – Birthplace of America’s Music.”

(BACK TO PODIUM)

You know, good things happen with good teamwork, and I
would be remiss today if I didn’t recognize our three great
partners in this project – the Mississippi Development
Authority’s Division of Tourism; the Legislature; and the
Mississippi Department of Transportation.

(MENTION THESE BY NAME)

Sen. Lydia Chassaniol, chair of the Senate Tourism
Committee

Rep. Diane Peranich, chair of the House Tourism Committee

Senator Tom King, chair of Senate Transportation

Rep. Warner McBride, chair of House Transportation

Dick Hall, Central District Transportation Commissioner

(Q&A)